

Digital “Legal Notices”

Article 17 - Citizen’s Petition

Providing Arlington with more Options for
Satisfying
Mass Gen Law requirements

What are Legal Notices?

Current Massachusetts (MGL) statutes require that various municipal actions related to elections, zoning, construction contracts, etc be widely published in the form of a *printed Legal Notice in a newspaper of general circulation*

How is Arlington affected?

The entities below currently, by statute, publish Legal Notices in the *Advocate & Star*, which is owned by Gatehouse Media/Gannett, and the closest newspaper of general circulation.

- Select Board
- Town Clerk
- Dept of Public Works
- Dept of Community Dev and Planning
- Arlington Public Schools

Actions by Gannett in 2022 regarding MA weeklies

- ❑ According to WBUR reporting in March 2022, Gannett announced the termination of print editions of 19 Massachusetts local newspapers.
- ❑ The *Bedford Minuteman* was one of these 19. The *Lowell Sun* became the town's newspaper of general circulation and the recipient of its Legal Notices, at a much higher cost to the town.. Bedford is also seeking permission for digital alternatives this year through legislative action.
- ❑ In the same Gannett announcement, 9 other local print editions, including the *Arlington Advocate* and the *Winchester Star*, were merged into 4 locals.
- ❑ The trend by Gannett regarding local weeklies is bound to continue.

What are the hard costs?

- ❑ A typical placement in the *Advocate* costs \$190 in 2022.
- ❑ If Gannett pulled the *Advocate & Star* out of print circulation, Arlington would be required to place legal ads in either the *Boston Globe* or *Boston Herald*?
- ❑ Presently, a typical-sized placement in the *Globe* costs more than \$900.
- ❑ With a possible four-fold increase in the cost of Legal Notices on the horizon, Arlington's annual cost for Legal Notice publication could increase from around \$10,000 to in excess of \$40,000

What are the soft costs?

- ❑ Fewer and fewer Arlington residents subscribe to the weekly *Advocate & Star*.
- ❑ Local-interest Legal Notices are not being seen by the people who should be seeing them.
- ❑ Deteriorates our local democratic processes.

Article 17 proposed solutions

A Home Rule petition to the MA General Court to “Allow the Town to satisfy the MA General Court regarding Legal Notices by authorizing the Select Board to choose two of five possible methods for publishing Legal Notices.” The choices will be:

- A newspaper of local or general circulation’s print edition
- A newspaper’s website
- Websites reporting local news or opinion which satisfy all criteria for digital publication set forth in G.L. c.4 section 13b
- A statewide website that may be maintained as a repository for such notices
- A town-wide website that may be maintained as a repository for such notices

